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*Estimated at
USIB Meeting
4 Nov 1958*

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

3 November 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Cuban Political Dilemma

Conclusions

1. The 3 November national elections probably will have little effect in resolving the political impasse in Cuba. Rebel leader Fidel Castro will almost certainly continue his guerrilla warfare campaign, although his movement in combination with other existing opposition groups probably cannot seize the government in the next few months. The military, which will become increasingly discontented with the civil war, will remain the only single force capable of deposing the dictatorship. Almost all the military would be likely to agree to such action if there were strong popular reactions to the electoral outcome or a sharp increase in Castro's strength. A faction of the military, including younger elements, may act regardless of whether there is a major change in the political situation. A military-dominated junta almost certainly could not

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restore peace to Cuba unless its membership and actions were such as to convince a majority of Cubans, including Castro, of its democratic intentions. However, regardless of developments over the next few months, it is possible that the military will be unable to unite in concerted action and that the political impasse will continue for some time.

A. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Fidel Castro's "26 of July Movement" ^{1/}

2. To date, Fidel Castro has been unable to arouse sufficient popular support to overthrow the Batista regime, but the regime has itself been unable to suppress or contain Castro. As a guerrilla operation, the 26th of July Movement now dominates much of the rural area of Oriente Province and has spread to other parts of the island. Since 1956, his armed forces have grown from a handful of filibusters to their present estimated strength of upwards of 5,000 men. Although still unable to challenge the army in sustained combat in open terrain, they have performed effectively as guerrillas. They have virtually paralyzed land transport within Oriente and have held small towns for short periods of time. They also control some rural

1/ The Movement derives its name from the date of Castro's abortive attack on the military barracks in Santiago in 1953.

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areas and have interfered with transportation in the neighboring province of Camaguey. The activities of the movement are being intensified in the central and extreme western provinces. A rebel underground organization operates in many cities and acts as liaison with other opposition groups, both in and outside of Cuba. The movement has branches in several Latin American countries, notably Mexico and Venezuela, and also in the US, which provide important financial and logistical support.

3. Castro's objectives beyond the elimination of Batista are not clear. This has raised doubts about his long-range intentions among many non-26 July opposition leaders such as Miro Cardona, secretary general of the FCR (Frente Civico Revolucionario), who at the moment support Castro.^{2/} His infrequent pronouncements reflect no particular program, although they indicate definite concern for agrarian reform and the regulation of public utilities. He has stated that if successful he would initially replace the Batista regime with a provisional civilian government, headed by Dr. Manuel Urrutia Lleo, and including representatives drawn from most groups in Cuba.^{3/}

^{2/} The FCR was formed in Cardenas on 20 July 1958 at a meeting of representatives of all revolutionary groups opposed to the Batista regime.

^{3/} Dr. Urrutia Lleo is a respected but little known former magistrate of a Santiago court who is now in exile. He is generally considered to have little political acumen.

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He envisages the restoration of democratic government following a transition period. There are no indications of the role Castro would seek to play in a new government.

4. Although Castro has attracted a widely varied following -- including some respected Cuban civic, business, and religious groups -- he, unlike the revolutionary in Venezuela, has not yet been able to gain widespread popular support. Twice his attempts to call a nationwide general strike have failed, largely because of inability to obtain support in the capital city of Havana.

5. Castro has failed to convince the majority of the Cuban people that democratic government can be reestablished only by revolutionary action. Cuba continues to enjoy relative economic prosperity, and a large part of the population, probably concerned that revolution would jeopardize their well-being, appear to hope that there can be a peaceful transition from authoritarian to constitutional government. The Roman Catholic Church, although apparently becoming increasingly anti-Batista, continues officially to support a peaceful change of government. Organized labor has not been willing to oppose the Batista regime under which it has received important benefits. Castro's operations -- marked by destruction

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of property, brutality, and disruption of community life -- have not only tended to reinforce popular doubts about the revolutionary approach, but have also provoked much antagonism.

B. The Role of the Cuban Communists

6. The position of the Cuban Communists seems to be a far cry from that of their counterparts in Venezuela, who played an important role in the revolution against former military dictator Perez, and thereby made possible their general acceptance as part of the civilian resurgence. There is no evidence that the "26 of July Movement" is Communist-dominated, although a few alleged Communist sympathizers have moderately important positions and others may be in the lower levels and within the organization's branch in Mexico. In fact the "26 of July Movement" has thus far rejected offers of support from the Popular Socialist Party, the Cuban Communist Party.

C. The Role of the Cuban Military

7. The major obstacle to the success of Castro's revolution is the military's continued support of the Batista government. The military, by committing the bulk of its forces in Eastern Cuba, had

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been able to retain control of urban areas and to restrict the guerrillas largely to mountainous areas. However, there is growing dissatisfaction and worsening morale among both officers and men in the armed forces, largely because of the lack of progress in closing out the two year old civil war and because of widespread military graft in combat areas. Many of the army enlisted personnel are unhappy because they have to give up soft posts for the hardships of combat operations against the guerrillas, in which the army is suffering fairly substantial losses. These factors have reduced the effectiveness of army units in the field. As yet, discontent has apparently not begun to crystallize around specific military elements. This development could occur if the majority of officers came to believe that the Castro movement was gaining such momentum that their continued support of Batista would jeopardize their own positions.

D. The 3 November National Elections

8. Faced with growing opposition to his regime throughout Cuba, President Batista has held constitutional guarantees in abeyance for most of two years, and has resorted increasingly to authoritarian measures. Nevertheless, Batista decided to go through with national elections on 3 November probably in hopes that by removing himself from office he would deny Castro his major target and thus cause the

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Castro campaign to lose momentum. To strengthen the effectiveness of this move, he has declared that he will install the newly elected president on 24 February 1959.

9. Batista permitted political parties to campaign, but since constitutional guarantees remained suspended, electoral activities were minimal and the public was generally apathetic even in those places where the rebels were unable to interfere with voting. It is almost certain that Andres Rivero Aguero, Batista's hand-picked successor, won the presidency, and that the government coalition won a large number of congressional seats and other offices. Although Rivero Aguero could probably have won a completely free election because of the lack of unity among the weak non-revolutionary opposition, his election under the present chaotic internal condition can seem little more than a sham.

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E. The Outlook for the Next Few Months

10. We believe that the elections and any subsequent efforts by Batista to withdraw from the limelight probably will have little effect in resolving the political impasse in favor of the government. Even if Batista left the country, the newly elected government would find it difficult, if not impossible, to convince Castro that it was no longer controlled by the dictator.

11. Under these circumstances, Castro will almost certainly continue his guerrilla warfare campaign. While he will probably gain additional strength, his movement, alone or in combination with other existing opposition groups, probably will not have the capability to seize the government in the next few months. There is little to indicate that important elements in the military or labor are about to shift their allegiance to Castro. Similarly, the general public despite the sham elections does not appear on the verge of giving active support to Castro.

12. A prolongation and possible intensification of widespread guerrilla warfare would further reduce the Cuban Government's ability to afford adequate protection for American lives and property. US private investment in Cuba amount \$850 million.

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(Only Venezuela and Brazil have greater US investments.) Although the Castro movement does not appear to be anti-US, its method is to exert pressure by the destruction of and levies against US as well as Cuban property. US properties in Cuba are so numerous and widespread that they must inevitably become increasingly involved in the spreading guerrilla warfare.

13. The Army remains the only single element capable of breaking the political deadlock -- if it is able to act with substantial unity. Almost all the military leaders would be likely to agree to take such action if there were strong, adverse popular reactions to the electoral outcome or a sharp upsurge in Castro's strength. It is possible that a large faction in the military, made up largely of younger officers, might decide to act even though there were no major change in the political situation. In either case, the military leaders would believe that they could protect their own positions only by installing a junta dominated by the military.

14. A military junta by itself would not be able to re-establish political stability, particularly if the junta included many of the present top military leaders who are closely associated with Batista. It would not be recognized by Castro or the

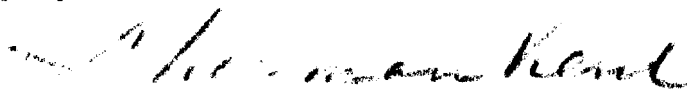
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majority of the Cuban people as a significant change. However, if, as in Venezuela, a junta were subsequently to purge itself of the more objectionable initial members, replacing them with younger and less venal officers, its chances for breaking the political impasse would be substantially improved. The situation would become even more favorable if such a modified junta, in an effort to undermine Castro's cause, took positive steps in the direction of restoring democratic processes. It is possible that this action by the junta would be successful and would cause the Castro movement to lose momentum. On the other hand, if the junta desired to end civil strife quickly, it would probably have to open direct negotiations with Castro. The latter's decision to come out of the hills would depend on the junta's ability to convince him that he and his men would be safe from reprisals and that they would be able to take an active role in national political life.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:


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